

VZCZCXRO1417
RR RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK
DE RUEHEG #6043 2700713
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 270713Z SEP 06
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1650
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS CAIRO 006043

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: GOE PULLS FOREIGN PAPERS FOR CRITICIZING ISLAM

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. NOT FOR INTERNET DISTRIBUTION.

1. (U) Liberal independent daily al-Masry al-Yom reported September 25 on its front page that Minister of Information Anas El Fiqqi prevented the local distribution of issue no. 19324 of the French newspaper Le Figaro; issue no. 216 of the German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung; and issue no. 14 of the weekly edition of the British newspaper, The Guardian. Post has no record or recollection of a similar instance of the Ministry of Information pulling copies of western newspapers since the late 1990s. At that time, then-Minister of Information Safawt El Sherif occasionally ordered the confiscation of copies of foreign publications which criticized the Egyptian President or contained articles deemed objectionable by the government.

2. (U) The ostensible reason given for the seizure of the three papers was that they had "published articles denigrating Islam and claiming that it was spread with the sword." El Fiqqi reportedly said that he would not allow any publication disparaging of Islam or instigating hate and contempt against any religion to be distributed in Egypt.

3. (SBU) Le Figaro's article, at least the internet version, was highly inflammatory and would almost certainly be considered offensive by the majority of the Egyptian public, as well as in the rest of the Islamic world. The case of the Guardian article was much less clear cut. The only article we were able to identify in the Guardian that might have prompted the seizure was one by an Arab researcher at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London which criticizes the Pope's statements about Islam. We do not know the basis for the seizure of the issue of Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.

4. (SBU) COMMENT: The Pope's remarks provoked a firestorm in the Egyptian press, and all Cairo papers published the specifics of what he said, along with stinging commentaries. Since the Pope's words are already in circulation, we find it strange that foreign newspapers, read almost exclusively by expatriates, should have attracted the ire of the Ministry of Information for publishing the virtually same information and commentary as the Egyptian papers did. In the case of the Guardian, part of the problem might have been that in making points that most Egyptian commentators would agree with, the author also said "Islam is still perceived as...the embodiment of evil," words too strong to be printed, even in a foreign language publication. The case of the Figaro article is more clear cut, however, as that article was significantly more inflammatory. The action may also be a belated effort to "get ahead" of public outrage at the Pope's remarks and to stake out a position of solidarity with the masses, timed to coincide with the beginning of Ramadan.

RICCIARDONE